

Valery Nicholas House (Casa Flinard)
723 Toulouse Street
New Orleans
Orleans Parish
Louisiana

HABS No. LA-33

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An Addendum to
Casa Flinard
723 Toulouse Street
New Orleans, Louisiana
in HABS Catalog (1941)

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

VALERY NICHOLAS HOUSE (CASA FLINARD)

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Address: 723 Toulouse Street, New Orleans, Orleans Parish,
Louisiana.

Present Owner Mrs. Alvin Hovey-King.
and Occupant:

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The name Casa Flinard was given to this building by the Historic American Buildings Survey when it was measured and drawn in 1936, because this name appeared in the first edition of the guidebook, Old New Orleans by Stanley Clisby Arthur.¹ In the third printing of the same book (1936, page 71), the original owner of the house is given as Valery Nicholas.

That Valery Nicholas was the original owner of the house and Hilaire Boutet, contractor, was the builder, is shown in the will of the latter, written November 25, 1808, as it appears in "Acts of Pierre Pedesclaux, Notary Public, Will Book."² Boutet stated: "I have contracted to build a house in this town for Mr. Valery Nicholas, having agreed with him verbally that I would construct it for the sum of six thousand piastres, and that all the materials which he could furnish would be deducted from the said sum, and on account of which I declare to have six hundred piastres for which I have not furnished him a receipt."

Valery Nicholas had acquired the lot with the buildings thereon the previous year from the Succession of Jeanne Touton Lemelle, a free woman of color. In the Act of Sale, passed before Pierre Pedesclaux (written Pedro in documents passed under the Spanish domination), Notary Public, July 8, 1807 (Notarial Records), we find: "The said lot of ground herein sold just as it is found and composed, with all the buildings, rights, issues, passages and servitudes without reserve or retention, just as the vendor made it. . ." As

¹Stanley Clisby Arthur, Old New Orleans (New Orleans: Harmonson Publisher, 1936).

²"Acts of Pierre Pedesclaux, Notary Public, Will Book," Nov. 25, 1808 (Notarial Records, Civil District Courthouse, New Orleans), pp. 197-201.

she had bought the lot from Geronimo Hisnard (as the name appears in documents written in Spanish), in 1802, it was a new house, and as the price was only 1,700 piastres, it must have been a small house, inadequate for Valery Nicholas' needs. He needed to have a shop on the ground floor with living quarters above.

The date of the erection must have been the latter part of 1807, and it is probable that the materials furnished by Valery Nicholas toward construction of his house were those salvaged from the demolition of the Lemelle cottage.

The name Casa Flinard is a misnomer for a second reason. The initial letter of the name as it appears in the script of the old documents, French and Spanish, could be deciphered either as Fl or as H. That the latter is correct is shown by the card file of names in the Archives of the City of New Orleans, in the Public Library, according to which it appears in The Louisiana Gazette, May 4, 1815, as Hinard, Jerome, Director of The New Orleans Insurance Company.

According to an article in The New Orleans States, June 20, 1953, by Samuel Wilson, Jr., of the College of Architecture, Tulane University, in a series entitled "New Orleans Houses," this lot was owned by Don Vincente Rilleux, one time lieutenant in the Spanish service, whose "feat of capturing an English cutter on Bayou Manchac was related in the Madrid Gazette in 1780 and quoted in Gayarre's History of Louisiana. In this account, his name is spelled Rieux." The former spelling was probably the Spanish phonetic spelling of the French form Rieux, for in this form the name appears in the current New Orleans Telephone Directory. Incidentally, still referring to the Wilson article, Don Vincente's daughter Marie Celeste's daughter, Celestine Musson, was the mother of the artist, Edgar Degas (see Note A, Appendix).

Don Vincente had no connection with Casa Flinard further than that he owned the site, together with the adjoining one and the larger site on the corner of Toulouse and Bourbon Streets, and in keeping with the usual layout of residential plots of that period, these two lots probably were occupied by the carriage house, stable, and the courtyard garden. Neither did Don Geronimo Hisnard, or Monsieur Jerome Hinard, as one may prefer, further than that he owned the site for two months previous to its purchase by Jeanne Touton Lemelle, who built thereon a cottage, some parts of which may have been reused in the present structure.

The Chain of Title for the property is as follows:

April 16, 1925, William J. J. Elger (from whom Mrs. Hovey-King acquired the property) acquired from the Union Savings and Loan Association for \$8,505, which had acquired from the Succession of W. W. Hume at auction sale the previous day for the same amount.

May 22, 1922, W. W. Hume acquired for \$4,000 from the Eureka Homestead Society, which had acquired the same day from Walker B. Ellis for \$4,500.

April 28, 1920, Walker B. Ellis acquired for \$2,700 from the Eureka Homestead which had acquired it two days earlier from Mrs. W. Lafargue for \$3,500.

July 3, 1902, Mrs. W. Lafargue acquired from Mrs. Caroline Aaron, widow of David Levy, for \$1,500.

May 12, 1899, Widow David Levy acquired from Auguste Huard for \$2,375.

March 23, 1895, Auguste Huard acquired from Theodule Beaufort for \$2,250.

November 3, 1887, Theodule Beaufort and Adele Aaron, widow by first marriage of Solomon Block, then wife of Theodule Beaufort, acquired from Mrs. Josephine Octave Lombard, widow of Pliny Louis Maspero, for \$2,250.

January 21, 1834, Widow Guillaume Joseph Lombard acquired from Benjamin Lacoste for 13,500 piastres.

September 5, 1828, Benjamin Lacoste acquired from Valery Nicholas and Heirs for 10,950 piastres.

July 6, 1807, Valery Nicholas acquired from the Succession of Jeanne Touton Lemelle for 1,700 piastres.

October 27, 1802, Jeanne Touton Lemelle acquired from Geronimo Hisnard.

August 11, 1802, Geronimo Hisnard acquired from Pedro Dulcide Barran.

February 1802, Pedro Dulcide Barran acquired at auction from the Succession of Vincente Rilleux.

This Chain of Title was compiled from the Conveyance Office Books and the Notarial Records, Civil District Courthouse, New Orleans, Louisiana.

The Act of Sale of January 21, 1834, gives the buildings and improvements as they are today, except that a cistern that is not there now is mentioned. We do not have any record of its removal, but it must have been at some time between February 1909 and 1918 according to the following evidence: on August 13, 1906, the Taxpayers Progressive Association decided to contest a new law

passed by the Legislature compelling all property holders to remove all cisterns.³ ". . . The new water works system was put into operation at the end of 1908. Until that time, the people of New Orleans depended upon water caught from roofs, stored above ground in cisterns built of cypress wood. . . . The river water was too muddy to be used for most purposes without filtration";⁴ in the early 1900's, measures were taken by the city government to eradicate all harbors of stagnant water. ("Their success demonstrated the possibility of eradicating yellow fever wherever proper precautions are taken against the propagation of the inoculated mosquito. The city cisterns were screened and oiled and thereafter an annual inspection was made to see that both of these methods of prevention were observed, down to 1918, when cisterns were ordered removed.")⁵

As with all houses of this type, there has always been a shop on the ground floor, with living quarters above. In the "Inventory of the Property of Marguerite Boisdore" (wife of Valery Nicholas) made after her death, we find a reference to: "Im. a gunsmith shop in the lower story."⁶ Today, fine perfumes may be bought in the same shop. In this "Inventory," we also find:

"Im. a parlor in the upper story
"Im. a bedchamber in the upper story
"Im. a dining room in the upper story"

Then, in the Act of Sale of January 21, 1834, we find: "The upstairs floor consists of four large rooms. . . ." Today, there is one double sized parlor across the front of the house, with the other rooms as described. When this partition was placed there, and when it was removed, we do not know.

So far as we can learn, there have been no historical events of importance connected with the house, but because it is typical and centrally located, it could have served as the setting for many of the stories of the Vieux Carré.

³"History in the Making, 50 Years Ago," The Times Picayune (New Orleans), August 13, 1956.

⁴Stewart O. Landry (ed.), Louisiana Almanac and Fact Book, 1951-52 (New Orleans: Louisiana Almanac and Fact Book, Inc.), p. 140.

⁵John S. Kendall, History of New Orleans (Chicago and New York: Lewis Publishing Co., 1922), p. 539.

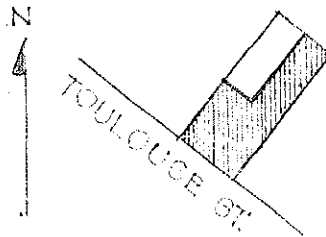
⁶"Acts of Felix de Armas, 1827" (Notarial Records, Civil District Courthouse, New Orleans).

Extensive research has not been carried on to determine the types of and value of the currency in use in New Orleans in the early years of the American domination. There is a great disparity between the prices paid for this property in 1828 (10,850 piastres), in 1834 (13,500 piastres), and in 1887 (\$2,250). The word "piastre" is usually translated as "dollars" but we do not know of any authority for this being done. The physical evidence of the house indicates that it has never deteriorated sufficiently to account for such a depreciation, even allowing for the financial stringency of the intervening years of war and reconstruction. We do not know how much Spanish currency remained in circulation, or for how long a time it remained in circulation, after the American accession. This could be ascertained only by a study of old banking records, if such exist.

Prepared by Georgia Bertha Drennan
New Orleans, Louisiana
April 1959

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

Because the points of the compass have played small part in the street planning of the city, as every city map shows, the local description of this location is "the downtown (or lower) side of Toulouse Street."



In an Act of Sale passed before Louis T. Caire, Notary Public, January 21, 1834 (Notarial Records, Civil District Courthouse, New Orleans) the buildings and improvements are described as follows:

"A brick house with upper story; consisting on the lower floor of a store, with a corridor and porte-cochere; the upstairs floor consists of four large rooms, two cabinets, a rear gallery and a front balcony. A kitchen with upper story consisting of five rooms, water closet, etc. . A yard paved with bricks and a cistern of about 1500 gallons capacity."

This building is interesting because it is a typical example of the French and Spanish colonial houses that served the purpose of both business on the ground floor and dwelling in the upper portion. The interest is enhanced by its having suffered very little from repairs or alterations, and it retains many of the original details. It is in considerably better condition now than when it was measured and drawn by HABS in 1936.

This serves as a description of the house as it stands today except that the cistern has been removed, and there is now one large room across the front on the second floor, as noted in Part I. There is a small patch in the refined cornice of the room, that shows where the partition was located (see Note B, Appendix).

In accordance with the building regulations adopted by the City Council of New Orleans, December 9, 1795, to be found in Document 248, "Book 4079," Louisiana State Museum, the house is so placed on the lot that the front wall is exactly on the front property line. So the main house, two rooms across and two rooms and a gallery in depth, occupies the entire front portion of the lot, which is 30 feet front by 80 feet in depth. The front balcony, with simple wrought-iron railing and pilasters that support the overhang of the roof, projects across the sidewalk. In the article by Samuel Wilson, Jr., quoted in Part I, he writes of this balcony trim: "While this form became quite common with the introduction of cast iron galleries after 1850, this is one of the few early examples of the type in wrought iron" (see Note C, Appendix).

The service wing, one room deep, stretches from the main house along southeast side of the lot for the greater part of its length.

Across the front of the house, on the ground floor, there is a small show window on brackets, a typical feature, though there may originally have been a door in that space. A few years ago the front was re-stuccoed and showed that the square-head door and show windows were circular-headed openings. Then there is a doorway, with wooden shutters, giving directly on the sidewalk. At the end, there is a high, wide wooden gate or door, as one chooses to call it, of two leaves, each leaf composed of two leaves. All hardware is hand wrought. This gate leads to what is called, in the old French and Spanish Documents, a corridor, for which no colloquial term has ever been developed, as it is not an English construction. This corridor extends from the sidewalk through the house to the courtyard, upon which it gives without any closing. The shop has a door that opens on this corridor, and the stairs go up from the corridor to the second floor, constituting the entrance to the dwelling portion of the house. These corridors are high enough and wide enough to accommodate a horse-drawn vehicle, and so served as a driveway, and it is by this term that they are more often spoken of than by any other, though they are seldom put to such use today.

Across the rear of the house, giving upon the courtyard, there is a loggia with two large arches separated by a square column. Both corridor and courtyard are paved with bricks; down the northwest side and across the end of the courtyard, there is a wide, continuous flower bed closely planted with bananas, sweet olive, Japanese plums, oleanders, azaleas, and smaller plants. Ficus ripens grows on the brick wall; and around the water spout, ivy is allowed to spread over the pavement.

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The gable roof, sloping to the front and back, must have been tiled originally, in accordance with the custom of the time when it was built; but it is now covered with slate. There is one dormer in the middle of the front.

In accordance with the custom of the Vieux Carré, the service wing has a roof of one slope only. The overhang of this roof across the balcony is supported by very gracefully carved rafters.

The second story of the main structure extends over the corridor at the end of the house, and also over the loggia in the rear. There is one very wide window with a beautiful fanlight and one small rectangular window with shutters, overlooking the courtyard.

The service wing contained the kitchen and the laundry on the ground floor. The dining room, as has been said, was on the second floor. This probably was not such an inconvenient arrangement as it seems to us today. In my own recollection, when living in a country house with the kitchen in a separate building, connected with the house by a covered porch, hot food was carried from the kitchen to the door of the dining room by runners, usually the larger negro children.

As was the universal custom, the house was heated throughout by fireplaces, the ones in the house having mantels, still in place, with very delicate and restrained decoration, those in the service wing being plain.

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New Orleans, Louisiana
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APPENDIX

- A. In 1872 Edgar Degas, the French painter, visited New Orleans where his brothers were cotton buyers. Rene Degas had married his cousin, Estelle Musson. While in New Orleans Degas painted "Portraits in an Office" - (Mussee Municipal, Pau) - the cotton office of the artist's uncle Mr. Musson, and a portrait of his cousin and sister-in-law, Madame Rene Degas (Chester Dale Loan - National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.).

- B. A recent remodeling of the street facade showed traces of circular headed doors on the ground floor.

The partition between the front rooms of the second floor was removed by Walker Ellis. Research should be made as to the identity of the carver or cabinet maker who did the elaborate mantel in the living room. This is American in detail though the forms are French. In New Orleans and up the river are many similar examples, but none as elaborate or so beautifully done. Much of this work is reminiscent of carvings in the Philadelphia area.

- C. I would like to speculate that, originally, there were wooden columns and railings on the street facade similar to those shown on a drawing in the Orleans Parish Notarial Archives of the home of Louis d'Aquin at 722 Toulouse Street, now the property of General L. Kemper Williams. A copy of this drawing is included with this report. Similar wooden balconies may still be found in the smaller towns in Spain and Mexico. The roof construction shows that the house originally had a tile roof like this drawing.

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New Orleans, Louisiana
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